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How To Get Wisdom And Why It Matters
Proverbs 2:1-22 Sermon

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Have you ever had someone try to sell you something? What's the typical pattern a salesperson uses? First, they tell you all the amazing benefits of their service or product. "Our miracle product…

…will lower cholesterol…"
…will help you burn fat and lose weight…"
…will keep your information safe and secure…"
…will give you better gas mileage…"
…will make you happy and content…"

And then once you're convinced they show you the price tag…

"For only four payments of $999.99…"
"If you only eat Subway for breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day…"
"If you sign up for our monthly never-ending subscription-based service…"
"Your monthly car payment can be as low as…$10,000!"
"If you sign your life and soul over we will…"

The typical pattern is—here's the benefits and then here's how you get them. Today, I want to reverse that pattern. First, I want to tell you how to get wisdom, and then I want to tell you its benefits. This is the pattern our passage takes and I like it because when I finally tell you the benefits of wisdom you'll be able to weigh in your own mind if it's worth it. So first…

How to get wisdom:

Wisdom is "skill for living", but living God's way instead of our own way. Once again the father-figure in Proverbs is teaching his son (who we can all put ourselves in the place of) how to get wisdom. He tells him four ways to get wisdom (not four different ways). You should do them all if you want to get wisdom.

Proverbs 2:1-5
1 My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
2 turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
3 indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
4 and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God. (NIV)

The first way to get wisdom we find in verse one.

1. Belief in God's Word (v1)

The father-figure says, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you…" The author Solomon is talking about a father's words found in the book of Proverbs, but he's also talking about God's whole Word, the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament today). The word for commands (mitsvah) can also mean the laws God gave his people Israel (Gen 26:5; Exod 26:28). So it's like Solomon or the father-figure is saying, "My son, if you want wisdom, believe in God's Word." Believe the Bible.

Each one of us comes to a turning point in our lives where we have to decide the final rule for our lives. Is it going to be God's unchanging perfect words and commands that although they are hard we know they are good, true, and best? Or are we going to choose our own feelings and intuitions and desires and what the world says is right at that particular moment? God's Word offers us a firm-foundation for our lives, a foundation that won't let us down. But if we choose anything else we're choosing something that might say one thing today and a different thing tomorrow.

Eggs are good for you. Eggs are bad for you. Drink coffee. Coffee is bad for you. Drink more milk. Drink soy milk. Drink almond milk. How about with the serious things? Divorce is bad. Get a divorce if it makes you happy. Divorce is actually detrimental to society. How many issues can you think of where 10-20 years ago everyone said one things and now today people say just the opposite? That is shifting sands, that's stormy waters (James 1:5-8). I want to build my life on the rock of God's Word that never changes. *First, we get wisdom by believing in God's Word.*

2. Meditation on God's Word (v1)

We're still in verse one. What does it mean to "store up" something? Did any of you prepare for Y2K? So kids, a long time ago everyone was worried that when the clocks on our computers turned from December 31st 1999 to January 1st 2000 there was going to be a computer meltdown that would cause food shortages and financial error, a turn-of-the century apocalypse. So to prepare people stored up canned food, powdered food, dried food, and water and drinks that wouldn't go bad. Our family bought powdered peach drink. So by golly if the world failed we were still going to have our powdered peach drink. And when Y2K came and no one but Blockbuster video had problems we still had our peach drink and it tasted okay.

We "stored up" to avert disaster. Likewise, God calls us to "store up" his Word within us to avert disaster in our lives. How do we do that? By meditating and memorizing the Bible. This is one of the reasons we have a foundation verse at our church for every sermon series. We want to encourage each other to "store up" God's Word in our own hearts because God uses it to strengthen us, give us hope, and teach us how to live. Cut the foundation verse out of the bulletin. Put it on your mirror or in your Bible, somewhere you will see it and memorize it. Think about it. Meditate on it. This verse and others will remind you of hope and God's love and promises. *Second, we get wisdom by meditating on God's Word.*

3. Acceptance of God's Word (v2)

Proverbs 2:2 says to turn our ears to wisdom and apply our hearts to understanding. Do you ever get in a disagreement and the person you're fighting with says, "You're not listening to me!" Sometimes that's true. One person is not paying attention because they're too busy talking or thinking. But usually that means "You're not agreeing with me." Proverbs 2 is saying to get wisdom we need to hear it with our ears and accept it with our hearts and agree to it with our lives. We need to open ourselves up and let God's Words and ways sink deep into who we are.

In Hebrew culture the heart was the core of a person, their true identity. We don't want God's Word to go in one ear and out the other, but go in through the ear, through the mind, and down deep into our heart. When I

prepare sermons that's one of the things I pray about. I want God's Word to affect me first but then I want it to affect you all too. We don't want to just sit here and hear without listing or agreeing. *Third, we get wisdom by accepting God's Word.*

4. Praying for Wise Character (v3-4)

This is perhaps the simplest way to get wisdom, ask God for it. Verse 3 tells us to "call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding" (NIV). If you want wisdom, pray that God will give you some. Sometimes prayer is the only step we take. We ask God for wisdom but we don't try to memorize and understand his Word. Prayer goes hand in hand with God's Word. It's like peanut butter and jelly or eggs and bacon or since we're in New England it's like fish and chips, or a boston-creme donut and Dunkin Donuts coffee. You just gotta have that prayer and you gotta have that Bible. Together… so good! If you want wisdom, ask God for it.

> **James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (NIV)

I've been listening to teachings on Proverbs by Dr. Bruce Waltke from BiblicalTraining.org. I recommend checking it out if you want to grow in your understanding of the Bible. One of the points Waltke makes is that wisdom isn't just knowing how to make the right decision, but wisdom is a character quality. When you and I pray for wisdom it's not only that we would make the right choice (it is that) but it's also praying that God would make us into the kind of people who would make the right choice. It's praying God would develop our character, who we are as people, so we choose with integrity and discernment.

So **how do we get wisdom**? *First, by believing in God's Word. Second, by meditating on God's Word. Third, by accepting God's Word, and fourth, by praying for God to give us wise character.*

I've told you how to get wisdom, but what are the benefits of wisdom? What makes it worth doing all those things? What makes it worth signing up, of purchasing the deal? Why does wisdom matter to you?

The benefits of wisdom:

The point of these things is not just to do them for the sake of doing them, but for the sake of something greater. Did you ever watch those old Mastercard commercials? A man and woman walk into a gas station. As the gas station attendant rings up their purchases he says:

> chips: $3
> frozen beverage: $2
> gas: $31
> starting a new life together: priceless…
>
> But then the woman shakes her head "no" so the gas station attendant tries again.
>
> rekindling a fire that never went out? (she shakes her head again)
> satisfying a much-needed slushy fix?… Priceless.

So what's the priceless things we are seeking by pursuing wisdom? God himself.

Knowing God (v5-6)

Verse 5 says if we seek wisdom, "then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." Waltke put fear of the Lord this way—it's believing that God's "threats are real and his promises are true." That's kind of an intense way to describe the fear of the Lord. I prefer an awe or reverence for God,

but there's also something to Waltke's definition. The fear of the Lord is intense. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave shows us that God's threats are real—that if we don't deal with our sins he will put us to death—but that his promises are real—that if we put our faith and trust in him he will forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It's as we come to understand who God is through Christ Jesus that we begin to actually know God, who he really is, not just who we imagine him to be.

Do you want to know *about* God or *know God*? You might know a lot of things about your favorite celebrity or professional sports athlete, you might know what movies they're in or their batting average, but that doesn't mean you know them. There's a simple test for if you know them. Do they know your name? If I were to walk up to Tom Cruise, Tom Brady, or Tom Selleck—you know, all the most popular Toms—and if I were to name drop your name, what would they say? "Oh yeah. I know her!" Or more likely… "Who?"

Come with me one step further. If I were to walk up to God and to name drop your name what would God say? "Oh yes, I know her. I love her very much." Or "Who?" We seek wisdom because we seek God. We want to know God. But the next verse tells us this is only possible by God's grace.

> **Proverbs 2:6**
> For the Lord gives wisdom;
> from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

We can only know God if God wants to know us. We can only acquire wisdom if God wants to give it to us. It's both an "as we seek" and an "as God gives" kind of exchange. We seek to obey and know God and God gives us a relationship with Jesus through his Holy Spirit. But really, put it in the reverse. God gives us a relationship with him and so we obey and know God. God's wisdom is entirely a gift, given to us by God's grace. *So what's the priceless benefit of wisdom? Knowing God.*

The benefits just keep growing out of this. If you know God you're part of the family and God protects you.

> **Proverbs 2:7-8**
> 7 He holds success in store for the upright,
> he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
> 8 for he guards the course of the just
> and protects the way of his faithful ones.

God's protection (v7-19)

God's wisdom grants us protection from potential disasters. I don't mean natural disasters but rather God's wisdom protect us from ourselves, from bad things we might do. God's wisdom protects us from:

- **Committing injustice** (v9-11): Sinning against others by treating them unfairly. If God gives us his wisdom we will want to treat others with fairness and equity even at cost to ourselves.
- **Wicked people who relish sin** (v12-15): We talked last week about "those who take advantage of others for their own gain." As God grants us wisdom and character like his, Lord willing we won't be drawn to wicked people but will recognize them for who they are and head a different direction.
- **Unfaithful people who break their marriage promise** (v16-19): Verse 16 says that "Wisdom will save you […] from the wayward woman with her seductive words." (NIV) Sometimes beauty might cause a break in marriage vows but often it is words, words of affirmation and acceptance. It's a listening ear. Emotional adultery comes before acting it out. God gives us wisdom so we know how to stay away from relationships that lead to this kind of disaster.

But there's one more benefit to wisdom.

A forever home with God (v20-22)

Proverbs 2:21 says, "For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it;" (NIV) It's an interesting way to close this passage in Proverbs because it's a reminder to the Israelite people that they get to stay in the promised land if they obey God and keep his commandments (Exod 20:12). They get to dwell with a wise God if they pursue living as wise people. But they fail. They sin. And God exiles them. And do we do any better? Not really. We live more foolishly than we do wisely.

But by God's grace, we can still become wise people. Because of Jesus, we can grow in wisdom. And there's so many benefits to wisom, the first of which is knowing God and an eternal home with God in the life to come. And as we become wise in this life, we also receive protection from many mistakes. We do life better. Hebrews says that the heroes of our faith "were longing for a better country—a heavenly one" (Heb 11:16). If that's you, if you're longing for a better home, pursue wisdom. Seek God by believing his Word, meditating on it, accepting it, and praying to become wise people with character shaped by God.

Last Saturday a team from our church went and helped build a home for two families in Lowell through Habitat for Humanity. We spent most of our Saturday working on trim in the bedrooms and a sump-pump in the basement. As part of the deal to become homeowners those receiving the homes have to put in 400 hours of labor themselves. It's not easy. It takes effort. Their house is a gift, but a gift they help work for. It's not just a one and done sale. It's a journey. That's kind of like wisdom. Wisdom is a gift, but it's a gift we help work for. Knowing God is a gift. Spending eternity with God. is a gift. God's protection is a gift, but it's a gift we ask for by seeking wisdom. Seek wisdom by seeking God

> **Proverbs 3:5-6**
> Trust in the Lord with all your heart
> and lean not on your own understanding;
> in all your ways submit to him,
> and he will make your paths straight. (NIV)

Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on June 29, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon at archive.org or read an online version on Substack. Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min).

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. How do we get wisdom?
2. Why does wisdom matter?
3. Is wisdom a thing, or more than that?
4. When is a time you needed wisdom?
5. How does knowing God grant wisdom?
6. What wisdom do you see in Jesus' story?
7. How do you need wisdom today? (prayer)

Resource Recommendations

Some of the following are affiliate links, which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We also recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

How To Read Proverbs (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

The Book of Proverbs by BibleProject

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: Everyday Wisdom

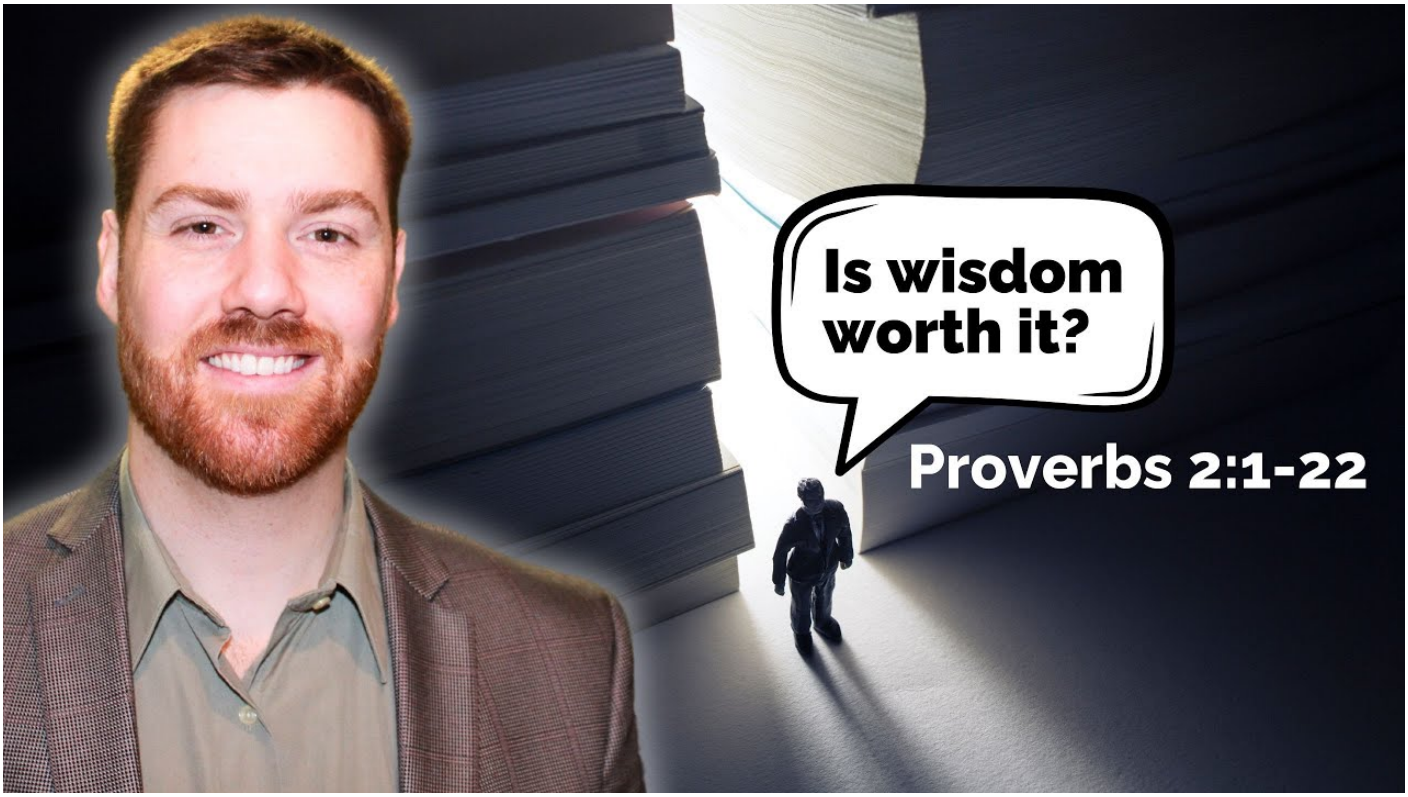
Endnotes

These references come from Tremper Longman III's commentary on Proverbs. See also Exodus 24:12, Leviticus 27:34, Numbers 36:13, and Deuteronomy 30:10.

This is one of Bruce Waltke's ways of explaining the fear of the Lord.

Waltke may have used a similar illustration. It's not original either way.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.



Watch the sermon on YouTube.